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ABSTRACT

This paper provides a transcript of a videotaped roundtable discussion on illiteracy among young people (aged 16-30) in Canada. The discussion centered mainly on French-speaking Canadians and school dropouts. Panelists declared that the present adult literacy education system focuses on adults and that young people cannot fit into that system. Since the school system has already failed these youth, the literacy education movement must reach out to them; listen to their concerns, problems, ideas, and dreams; and provide appropriate learning situations and materials. The panelists recommended separate programs for this age group. They also stressed the need for dropout and illiteracy prevention through early intervention with students in the elementary schools. (KC)

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L'alphabétisation et les jeunes

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TABLE RONDE :
YOUTH AND LITERACY

INTRODUCTION : TESTIMONIES OF LEARNERS

The five or six who attended primary school with him all dropped out in the first year of secondary school. Because they weren't ready for it. But these were kids who even in primary school could be found in the arcade after class. They weren't able to follow the course at school. They weren't able to finish their homework and they weren't able to do anything to please the teacher. They would go to the arcade, and there they learned to master the machines!

Especially the young kids! There are lots of young kids now. There are even some who finish school now and still have trouble reading and writing ... and they even have Grade 12 diplomas. This shouldn't happen! This situation shouldn't exist! In my time, I could believe it - because there were 40 kids in the class and the emphasis was really on the catechism. That played a big role, because I would spend a lot of the morning in the halls on my knees, and I sure knew my catechism. The other subjects worked the same way! But that's the way things were at that time. But today!

I have my Grade 12. I finished with a diploma like many students, but I didn't know how to read or write. Young people are the future, first, today (sic). There are many who finish school and don't know how to read or write. I think they really need to be helped.

Because at one point, my daughter was having lots of problems at school. I wanted to help her and tried to return to Northern College, but I wasn't capable of functioning in those classes. I had never functioned in a normal class. This meant that when I ended up in a class with adults and all that, I was lost. I had nothing to ... my French wasn't too good; I had difficulty in Math. So I stopped. I quit school. I said, this isn't my place! I can't do anything. I'm not good!

I am determined! I want my diploma. I have wanted it since I was small, ever since I failed at school. It is something I want very very much. Even if I am 80 years old, I am going to get my diploma!

I read more than ever now. What does it do for me? It encourages me. It pushes me, because I have ... I always carry my book about with me. I have my coat there and can show you, I have my book in order to know how to read. Wherever I am, if I have any free time, I read. One day I hope to improve on this. And so I work so I don't lose it ... so I don't lose the desire to learn, you know.

Jean Fugère :

Hi, I'm Jean Fugère. The subject of today's round table is : "Youth and Literacy". A subject which is suddenly attracting a lot of attention, for two reasons. First, because to the great astonishment of all, there are more and more young people leaving school but having trouble reading and writing. Second, because even though these difficulties prevent them from finding work, from making a place for themselves in life, the young people don't see any solution to their problems in the present literacy programs.

So how do we go about reaching today's young people, and above all, ensure that tomorrow's generations of school graduates count fewer illiterates ? Well, this is what we are going to find out in the company of our guests.

First of all, Élise Massicotte, who is a literacy facilitator at La boîte aux lettres, in Longueuil, the only community literacy group in Quebec targetting youth exclusively.

Élise Massicotte :

Hello.

Jean Fugère :

Katherine Lagrandeur, you are the assistant at the Regroupement d'alphabétisation populaire francophone de l'Ontario, and with Graffiti you are getting ready to set up the first literacy group for young people in your province.

(Page 4 of French text is missing)

And then last fall, at La boîte à lettres, we conducted a survey of the young illiterates - 100 young people - and tried to draw a typical portrait of these young people. The results of this enquiry will be published soon and we are going to use it in an awareness and prevention campaign in the primary schools along the South Shore.

Jean Fugère : When you talk of young people, exactly what ages are you referring to ?

Élise Massicotte : From 16 to 30 years of age. La boîte à lettres is the only group that targets young people from 16 to 30 years of age.

Jean Fugère : Very good. Thank you. Katherine, for your part, how did you come to be interested in literacy for young people ?

K. Lagrandeur : In my case, it was mainly for personal reasons. I realized at a certain point that in my family, I am Franco-Ontarian, most were illiterate. And also that my brother who had dropped out of school was also illiterate. And I said to myself, okay, I absolutely have to do some work in this area.

I got into it by doing volunteer work at Alpha-Toronto. And, as you mentioned, I sit on a committee called Graffiti. It's

a centre we are planning to set up in Toronto, which will specifically target Toronto's young drop-outs. It is a literacy program. We took our inspiration from the current program "Beat the Street". We also work with them, but it is mainly for the Francophones and for our own people.

Also, I hope to start up a similar centre in Ottawa, probably in the fall.

Jean Fugère :

Gino, yours is a different story because you are not directly involved, but you are very closely interested, nevertheless, in literacy training.

Gino LeBlanc :

Absolutely. I started in '89 when I attended the ACELF convention in Quebec when International Literacy Year was launched. And then I attended a workshop specifically on New Brunswick where we were given figures which ...there was a high illiteracy rate in my region, in Acadia. So from there, I got involved a bit with the Fédération d'alphabétisation du Nouveau-Brunswick.

And then in Acadia, at the Fédération des jeunes, our mission as an agency is to give the young Francophone Acadians of New Brunswick the tools to develop and to help develop their community. So when we realized we had lots of young illiterates, I think that

it's a problem deserving of special attention and that we must give these young people the mechanisms to become literate.

Jean Fugère : André, you have a different story to tell. Your degree of involvement in literacy for young people is somewhat more personal.

André Thibault : Well, yes it is. Mine is a coming-together of what is personal and what is professional. That is, on the personal level, I have had to deal with cases that were very close to me, of kids dropping out, at different grade levels, and have sometimes had to intervene.

Professionally, as a sociologist, and it is in this capacity that I am involved in the research, a large part of my career was spent in the continuing education sector. As a sociologist, I have a major interest in the question of social change and I find that, at the moment, we often very poorly evaluate, and we have very biased perceptions of the current generation of young people. And this disturbs me greatly and I find we must take this into account in the strategies and rectify them accordingly.

Jean Fugère : Well, let's talk about the young people specifically, because the issue of literacy training for the young people is

also the issue of drop-outs. Because most of the illiterates are, we have to admit, drop-outs. In Quebec 38% of the drop-outs are Francophone. And if we extrapolate these statistics a bit, because Statistics Canada does not give individual statistics for Francophones - everything is mixed up - we can suppose that approximately 40% to 45% of the drop-outs are to be found among Canada's young Francophones.

What's happening ? Why so many drop-outs ? Let's start, perhaps, with New Brunswick. Gino ?

Gino LeBlanc :

Where I come from, in Acadia, there is indeed a whole bunch of reasons, whether or not it is the fact that people are behind in their studies, but we also find that in the rural areas, education is not necessarily highly valued. And if the parents, say, are illiterate and the parent has had a problem in the educational system, when the child comes and says "okay, I'm not necessarily interested in what is going on in school", the parent is going to say, "okay, I'll call the principal and fix things for you". Therefore, the high value placed on education as an important tool is not always there when we speak of the rural regions in Acadia in particular. So this is a big factor among many. I think that it can't just be brought down to a de-valuation of education.

Jean Fugère : André, you work in the community, you have seen young people, and you have seen some drop out. Why do they drop out ?

André Thibault : Very often we ask why the young people drop out of school, why they drop out of many of the social institutions ? I am struck by the reverse side of the coin : by how the school drops the young people! And by how, with regard to the school and the work market, it's more often the dregs of the past they are offering the young people who themselves are looking towards the future. In a sense, there are the contents of the learning ...I don't mean that the young people don't have problems, but the territory is far from offering them any real motivation.

The young people aren't crazy, they aren't naive. They know full well that the expected returns of staying in school longer begin to show really only after they have invested a lot of time in school. Between having completed half of your secondary schooling and all of your secondary schooling, the future prospects are pretty well the same. They are caught between a media-oriented world, which makes them familiar with one type of language, and a school which talks an entirely different language. And I'm not saying that the school must also become as "kitschy" as of what is happening in the mass media, a lot but the discrepancy is too great!

Jean Fugère : And so, there is a certain failure at the level of the school system and at the level of the contents of the school system. It's a little what you would say ...

André Thibault : ...and society's capacity to suggest ways of social integration that are adapted to a new generation, which has new future prospects. It's a little general, but...

Élise Massicotte : I agree with André, but I'd like to add also the importance of drawing a link between illiteracy and poverty. And we find here again...we find ourselves back at school, and precisely, there is another level of language spoken in certain working class environments, in a certain social class. So we find a lot of young drop-outs, a lot of young illiterates who come from an environment ...most of them come from quite a poor social class, from a disadvantaged environment.

Jean Fugère : So there is a link to be made directly between under-schooling, illiterates and drop-outs. It all goes together.

I'd like to come back to a very, very personal experience. Your brother dropped out. Why precisely ?

K. Lagrandeur : Well, I'm not my brother so I can't say. I can only suggest some of my personal theories. It boils down somewhat to what André was saying. It's that the system failed, in his case, to help him. That is, often the victim

is blamed, but we often forget that ...well, I know that at my secondary school, an awful lot of emphasis was placed on university, on extremely high marks. We often forget the students, like in my case, who are doing okay, who are getting "D"s and "C"s, but are neglected because, this person would say to himself, "Once I finish secondary school, I know I won't be able to go to university and probably not to college either, so what am I going to do ? I'm going to work. I know that having my Grade 12 or Grade 13 won't make much difference, so I'll drop out and take a job. It's better for everyone!"

It's funny, because the system is there in principle to help the young people, to teach the young people, but that's not how it works. They say, okay, you, you don't fit into the system, so there's something wrong with you. But the system doesn't look at itself, doesn't question itself, doesn't say : "Are we the ones who are wrong in fact ?" I think that is the big problem.

Jean Fugère :

So, on the one hand, there is this system which doesn't call itself into question, but then there are the young people who, once they are no longer in that system, seriously call themselves into question and must experience some extremely difficult times.

You work with them every day, what does it mean, today, not to know how to read or write or to have trouble reading or writing ?

Élise Massicotte : Well, it means lots of difficulties in your daily life, in all the little things such as finding your way about Montreal on the subway and having to read ...well, where am I going ? What station ? It's going into the grocery store and seeing soup cans all with the same labels, but different kinds and you can't read them. There are lots of things. Small things and then really big things, like having to go to vote - your fundamental right as a citizen : going to vote but not being able to read the ballot. Why aren't there photographs on the ballots ?

We don't think of all the times in a day when we need to read or write. But there are many of them.

Jean Fugère : If the system says, "you are a mistake", as you said Katherine, do you not just say at that time, "there is no chance of a future for me ?" At the start, do you not see yourself as something unnecessary ?

Élise Massicotte : As a failure ...you see yourself more as someone who has not succeeded. It's one failure after the next. You suffer it, you are the victim. You lack self-confidence, you are not independent, you feel completely dependent. Then the young people come to us and say, "well, I want to walk alone, that's why I'm here". It's really big like that.

Jean Fugère :

I would like to go on perhaps a bit more with the portrait of the young illiterate, because it's perhaps not clear for everyone. You work at this Boîte à lettres which deals with these young people on a daily basis. Is there a typical portrait ? How can we define them ? Can we catalogue them in some way ?

Élise Massicotte :

I don't think they need to be catalogued. They have been very much catalogued in their lives. This is one of the first problems they tell us about. We found, in the enquiry we conducted among 100 young people, that 74 out of 100 young people came from special classes. So they had attended adaptation classes at either primary or secondary school, or both.

On an average they have ten years of schooling, that is, ten years spent at school. They come out of school at the end of ten years and they are functionally illiterate. It is clear there are defects in the school system. I think everyone agrees with this. The young people too ...well, most of them are poor. They are on welfare in Quebec. 70% of our survey group are either on welfare or are unemployed.

We can also say they are very dependent. One third of them still live with their parents, still live in their family. That's pretty well the typical portrait, the broad lines we get from this survey. Then, of course, we get these young people coming to us with very little self-confidence, feeling very insecure,

being somewhat disillusioned. Well, they want to learn ... but they don't want to go back to the school they knew, they don't want to hear any talk of school, they say, teach us, but differently.

Jean Fugère :

You're lucky. There are young people who come to you, and there are drop-outs who say, well, we'll go to the literacy program anyway. But the studies show, we hear this everywhere, very often the young people aren't interested in taking the path to literacy. Why not ? Why aren't they ?

Gino LeBlanc :

I imagine there are several factors. First, the profile : an illiterate, for a long time, used to be an older person who had escaped the system, who had a job and who had trouble getting by in his daily life. I don't think this profile necessarily corresponds to a young person. And the young person often did not see the new opportunities the program offered him; it was simply the same system in which he hadn't adapted well and the system hadn't adapted to him. So he didn't necessarily want to return to this same system. I think there are several factors that could come into play to resolve the situation.

K. Lagrandeur :

These young drop-outs are very afraid of schooling. Sometimes it's very simple for us, we say : good, this is a solution! This is what we're going to do!

Why don't they come to the centre ? We don't go to the young people; we don't ask them what we should be doing, how to recruit them. And then I think that this is a big oversight in the system as such.

Jean Fugère : What is being done concretely for the young Francophone illiterates in your respective provinces ? Let's start with New Brunswick.

Gino LeBlanc : Okay. To put you in the context, the Acadian youth population numbers about 125,000. Identification is done in the schools, but the problem is tackled in the Access centres. This is an initiative of the provincial and federal governments - young people 15 to 24 years of age are identified as potential drop-outs. And then we draw up a kind of profile, we really individualize the program for them, with regard to their choice of career, what they would like to do. The system has not responded to their needs, so they are brought to these centres.

We realize, from these centres, that most are almost illiterate and they have to be referred to literacy courses. So the program itself is given in the community colleges in New Brunswick and then, it is extremely rare that there are classes specifically for young people. So they are put in classes with adults. And that creates problems. We are, you can see, at a very early stage in New Brunswick.

Jean Fugère : Let's see what is happening in Ontario. Katherine.

K. Lagrandeur : Yes, it's something like Gino has described for New Brunswick. Unfortunately in Ontario, the community literacy movement is aimed mainly at adults or older people. We have a lot of trouble reaching the young people. We know they're there. We know there are young illiterates since close to 50% of the Franco-Ontarian population is illiterate. So this is why we need centres like Graffiti, other centres.

We also need learning materials, I think, aimed at young people because on the whole we target adults in our literacy programs and so our learning materials are aimed at them too. So they don't really express the reality of the young people.

André Thibault : It is so true, for our research, that the big obstacle has been to reach young people to interview. They are somewhere, but they are not in the same networks.

Jean Fugère : Why not ?

Gino LeBlanc : Oh, there is a Francophone community existing among the older people. There is a tie with some institutions, and a tie with professional services offered. And young people move around a lot more in the urban cosmopolitan society which doesn't have the same means of communication.

Jean Fugère : Katherine, would you like to add anything ?

K. Lagrandeur : I wanted to add also that the Franco-Ontarian situation is quite specific, compared to that of Quebec and New Brunswick. That is, this is a majority English-speaking society, and the Franco-Ontarians often say to themselves, well, there is no Franco-Ontarian model in the better types of jobs. They say, why get literacy skills in French. Often, unfortunately, they turn more to English and acquire literacy skills in English.

Gino LeBlanc : And so we come to the phenomenon of assimilation, that the young people find themselves in an English-speaking entourage.

K. lagrandeur : That's right.

Jean Fugère : What is happening today in Quebec ?

Élise Massicotte : In Quebec, it's a little different, I think. Recently, in any case, in recent years, there has been an increase in the number of young people attending literacy activities. In Quebec, there are two networks. There is the community literacy network, with close to 34 community literacy groups, and then there are the school commissions which offer courses.

The difference between the two, the big difference, is that the resources are not the same. Quebec's school commissions receive about 33 million dollars and Quebec's community groups receive 2 million. So our

little group, La boîte à lettres, has a small grant from the Ministry of Education, and we also do fundraising to survive.

In the statistics, those I have seen, of the 21,000 who were enrolled with the school commissions - this is a survey which came out recently on student enrollments, adults enrolled in the school commissions - one third, however, are young people under 29 years of age, from 15 to 29 years old. That's a lot.

The community groups haven't yet brought out their statistics, but we don't have any recruitment problem. Normally we use the learners themselves a lot. They do the recruiting. It may be in the caisses populaires, the shopping centres. It works quite well.

Jean Fugère :

Let's talk perhaps in fact ... are there any dropouts at "La boîte à lettres" itself ? Do any of the illiterates drop out once they are in the program ?

Élise Massicotte :

Yes. And it happens quite often. I think that, in some areas, our programs certainly could do with some improvements. It's not that we have all the answers. The school commissions are having the same problems. I think the dropout rate for the school commissions is 50%.

So, what should we be doing to improve our services ? I think we have to do a lot of listening to their needs. It's the only solution I can come up with.

Gino LeBlanc : We also have a number of dropouts. I might be able to come up with some explanations in terms of what we have seen back home in New Brunswick. The problem is in fact that the material is not adapted to the young people. They are put in classes where the textbooks are geared to an adult population, like Katherine was saying earlier. So they find themselves in classes with adults and young people, with material not adapted to their age-group. So there's not too much incentive.

Jean Fugère : Yes, André.

André Thibault : And what strikes me with this generation of young people is that they aren't easily taken in. And among the youth who have dropped out that I have known quite well, and based on the characteristics of these young people noted in the many surveys undertaken, regardless of subject, what we see is a great deal of skepticism. And a lot of adults are often heard saying, "Ah, this generation is indifferent". Not so! It's a generation that asks questions and it's a generation that's not going to go for empty promises.

So, I think that, in particular - and this is true even in my own family, - as soon as it appeared possible to combine work and studies,

there was a chance to get back at it. Another youth - the son of one of my friends whom I had come and live with me in my home for a year - had dropped out in the middle of secondary school. When he started making projects of his own for his future that required further study, then he had a reason for studying. But apart from this, the old story that you're a better person and have more opportunity in life if you have an education, I don't know too many young people who still buy this.

Jean Fugère :

That's interesting because it gives ... you get right to the heart of the question. What, in the end, is going to work for the dropouts ? What is going to make them want to come back ? There are specific examples. What works in your respective provinces ? What has proven successful and shows that, yes, we should give this or that a try ?

Gino LeBlanc :

As far as we are concerned, what seems to work for us in the Accès centres, is that we ask the youth specifically : "What do you want ?" They tell us what they want : "I want to be a truck driver, I want to be a fisherman". Great. We give them tests. If first we find they are illiterate they are placed in a program that corresponds to their needs - Grade 9 or Grade 12. And then we tell them : "Look, to be a truck driver, Grade 7 is not enough education", or something to that effect "You have to be able to meet certain

criteria." And there you have it - one of the great advantages of centres like Accès is that the programs can be adapted to each person's individual needs.

K. Lagrandeur : And I find it's just as you were saying. It's a good system too, and I was also going to mention that, it would be an idea for GRAFFITI, for us in fact, to talk to the young people, tell them, "Ok, what do you want out of life ? Me, what I want is this."
And then we tell them how to go about realizing their goals. As a goal it's realistic. There are no promises, no eulogies from the university ... It's a very specific curriculum, very personal which, we hope, will work out very well.

Élise Massicote : I agree with Katherine. I think what's important is to always keep that in mind; to meet with the young people during the course of their training process and remind them of their goals.

K. Lagrandeur : Ah, yes.

Élise Massicotte : We do this from time to time at La boîte à lettres and they then again ask themselves the question, "Why am I here ? Am I motivated ? Why am I motivated to be here ? It's a tool I want to acquire, reading and writing, to achieve such and such an objective or goal." It's very specific.

Jean Fugère :

You talk of the young people's motivation and incentive, but I wonder - because I'm not familiar with the problem either - but when the young people come, do they really know what they want to do once they have dropped out of the school system, and they are a bit lost, a bit uncertain ? Do they know then ? Do they already have an answer or does this area not require some work ?

André Thibault :

One thing that strikes me in this regard ... as adults we have a lot of adapting to do in terms of this question, because we're a generation of planners of very long-term plans for the future. And if we look for this in the young people, we're not going to find it often, except among the over-achievers who are the hope for a high performance society in the future.

But projects for next month, and for six months down the road, they've got them. And if we are prepared to listen, then we'll get an earful! But these projects are often - I don't know if your experience touches on this, but in any case with respect to my own contacts - are often very realistic. Just as there were great ideological dreams - justice for all - fifteen years ago, we have to admit that those who claim to be the main spokespersons for common sense are actually off in another dream-world that wants everyone to excel and become over-achievers, with

access to high-tech jobs that will bring Japan down a peg or two, you know.

The young people don't believe this either, just becoming a truck driver, yes.

Élise Massicotte : Yes!

Jean Fugère : Are there no ... now, you are probably in a good position to know this also, inasmuch as you work in the school system. Is the school system the solution ? Because taking the young dropouts who have left the school system and trying to reintegrate them via another route, into the school system, is that the solution ?

André Thibault : Not for everyone ... not for everyone. We have to get rid of the very real model of people who, happily at 35, 40 and 50 have come back to school because they have been suffering since the time they were young, because there was no place for them in the schools. We have to discard this model when we speak of today's youth who have been there and then ... there's an expression I often use ... either they didn't like school, or the school didn't like them.

Élise Massicotte : Yes it's really ... especially if they were really pushed at school, nagged a lot by their parents or their teachers. And now, they have somewhere they can just be themselves. And I

think we have to follow them at their own rhythm. And if their rhythm is to slowly be able to read a paragraph, sign a cheque, use the automatic teller, well that's very practical and that's that. And we accept it for what it is.

Jean Fugère : Are you familiar with the enquiry that was conducted for La boîte à lettres? Have any of your visions changed in terms of this problem ?

Élise Massicotte : I think that ... from the enquiry in any case, what we found to be the most pressing in confirming our initial assumptions was to try and prevent, to intervene at the source, and try to make people aware so there wouldn't be any more young students who are illiterate! So the community ... I think this is a problem for society, it's a community problem, but we really have to start intervention at the level of the family, not just in the schools. It's really a question of many milieux coming together to do something. With regard to early childhood, beginning with the 3-, 4- and 5-year-olds. That's where you have to start tackling the problem!

Jean Fugère : Just a brief word on the successes achieved, because there aren't only failures in the world of illiteracy.

Élise Massicotte : Thank goodness!

Jean Fugère : Now you, you actually see some success stories. What kinds of successes do you see, at your centre, at La boîte à lettres in Longueuil ?

Élise Massicotte : I think the most spectacular successes we have seen, were ... they are encouraged to get involved in community activities, all the young people together. It's watching the process of solidarity, and in the end, seeing them manage to ... they made a video about themselves; they themselves took part in it; these gave their own testimonies. They took part in radio broadcasts; they wrote the scripts, they were the ones who did ... they succeeded in producing marvelous things together and they know it. It has given them a great deal of confidence in themselves. They are excellent communicators. They have really developed this art as a trick of survival.

Jean Fugère : Is there ... one often hears said the young people have no future, that they don't see how they can get out of this situation, etc. But do they still have dreams ?

Élise Massicotte : I'd say, yes, most of them do. They are young, they have their future before them, and they know it. They have dreams. Sometimes they're very simple, and then again sometimes the dreams are a little unrealistic. I think there's a bit of everything.

Jean Fugère : And, Katherine ...

K. Lagrandeur : Yes. I was just going to say ... because I work in a popular movement in Ontario, as well, I found the same thing. Less so with the youth because, like I said, we have a bit of trouble trying to reach them, but even with the older illiterates, this need to speak out!

This motivation to stand up and speak! Just the other day, at l'Alpha-Partage, the illiterates who stood up before the whole world at the plenary meeting - I myself would never have had the nerve - and who said : "This is what I want; this is what I'm going to do; this is what we should do together." And it's great! It's a big success! It's a step forward! And I would like to see this same kind of appropriation of the right to speak among the youth as well. I think it would be extremely important.

Jean Fugère : Is there not also ... I wonder and this is going off on a tangent ... but shouldn't there be some kind of promotion of awareness, because I get the impression that the issue of illiteracy and youth is still an isolated problem. Some are aware of the situation but the statistics put forward during this round table discussion are rather frightening. One gets the impression that the people don't realize the extent of the problem. Do you get the feeling we know, at this very moment, what drama is unfolding on a daily basis ?

Gino LeBlanc : In any case, with us, in terms of what is being done for the young people, it's practically non-existent. So I think some consciousness-raising has to be done here at home. Once the community begins to realize that literacy training for young people is tantamount to re-establishing French in the community, refrancizing it, giving it pride in its language, in a minority environment, in any case, like in Acadia, I think the population will be attracted to this phenomenon, and will then want to take steps to correct this. I think that's something ...

K. Lagrandeur : Also ... and I think there's always this question of the victim, also. I think we're going to have to start saying, yes, ok, I know that 50% of the population in Ontario is illiterate - the Francophone population - but I think you have to have enough pride to come out and say it, "I'm illiterate", and not hide your head in the sand and then say, "No I won't say it, I'm too ashamed", because otherwise, we'll never free ourselves of this problem!

Jean Fugère : In the end, you could almost say it's a decompartmentalization. We should be able to say, "I'm illiterate, I'm working to correct this and I'm proud of it." What I mean is that someone should be going out into the schools, that those who are already taking part in programs should be able to reach ... besides I believe you're planning to do this ...

Élise Massicotte : That's what we're starting to do at La boîte à lettres. I think we've been thinking about doing this for quite some time; but we often don't have the necessary resources. That's often the case in the small groups with limited resources. Right now, however, the project being readied is ... they are going to have facilitators go out to the schools to make the teachers, principals and specialists aware of the situation. They'll be starting with the elementary schools. We're hoping to, perhaps, be able to continue this at the secondary school level and even among the young people, at youth homes for instance. But we thought the elementary level would be a good place to start inasmuch as it's at the source. As I was saying, it's really getting to the source of the problem.

That's it. The project, as a whole, is a matter of making people aware of the situation, of talking obviously, of talking about this to the youth! And showing them other young people! In this connection, we plan to use the video, "Je ne sais pas lire" (I can't read) and let them hear the testimonies of other young people : these are young people who are coming out of your schools!

Jean Fugère : Is there any cause for optimism in terms of the future of youth at this time, or in terms of the future of our society, when one

considers that one in three young people is now experiencing problems with reading and writing ?

André Thibault : No. Let's just say we are preparing a society where the democratic participation rate is going to be low, where the circulation of ideas is going to be slow, and where the main tool of communication is not shared by a sufficient number of people. Well that's it, it's a society operating in a constant state of breakdown and in low gear.

Jean Fugère : Élise.

Élise Massicott : I believe this calls for urgent intervention. And intervention - and I say this and I have said it before - I think intervention has to be done at the source of the problem. We certainly want to fight this, this illiteracy among our youth. And we have to intervene at the source, practice prevention.

The title of our soon-to-be-published paper is "A l'avenir, prévenir", (Prevent in the Future) but that's precisely it! Such projects already exist, in Quebec, for example. There are others in other countries : Belgium, and France, with home study workshops, support being available within the school itself, and support for children with learning problems. One can also think in terms of support for the family,

which can be done through social facilitators, the "CLSC" (Local Community Health Centre) or the community.

There are also programs for illiterate parents, who are integrated into their children's school. Because the parents say, I interviewed one woman who told me : "The urgent thing for me is to be able to help my child when he's in school, and I have to be able to follow what he's doing. I would be prepared to go to my child's school when he is in school, in his classroom, and even follow along in his learning. So now there's a program in Quebec entitled, "J'apprends avec mon enfant". (Learning with my child) which is very interesting at that level, where illiterate parents can go to their children's elementary school and take the same program.

I'm not saying this is the solution but these are interesting avenues toward a solution.

Gino LeBlanc :

As for me, I think ... well to sum up what André and Élise said, we have to start thinking in terms of prevention instead of looking for remedies as we are now doing. I think this is urgent.

K. Lagrandeur :

And also to take up what André was saying, it's surprising, it's quite frightening to note that if one in three young people is illiterate, we will soon have a society, that

otherwise puts so much emphasis on writing, that [we'll have a young person] who won't be able to analyze a text, won't be able to analyze what is happening from the point of view of the government or economics, and at that level, won't be able to claim his/her rights.

So, again, I still feel it's a question of awareness. We have to get to the root of the problem, as Élise mentioned. And also there should be less discrepancy between the school system and employment, and literacy training and the individual.

Élise Massicotte : There really is a need ... we really need group action, that is, an integration of all of this, the school system, the job market, facilitators at the community level. And we really have to work together to get ourselves out of this situation.

Jean Fugère : And, Katherine.

K. Lagrandeur : Yes. I would like to add that we should always remember that the young people have their own reality, and that it is very, very important in the literacy movement to have centres that are intended strictly for this youth group! We shouldn't put them in the same boat with the other older illiterates! Therefore more literacy centres are needed, such as the La boîte à lettres in Quebec, and the centre we want to set up in Toronto, we need more!

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Jean Fugère :

We have now come to the end of this round table. I want to thank our guests for their comments, their thoughts, their suggestions as well as their proposals. It's up to you now to do as much and to follow up this discussion.

THE END